

Republicans offer their plan to fund education

Sacramento -- Republican lawmakers say they have a plan to save education funding, which like most other items in the deficit-drenched state budget is in danger of facing significant cuts in spending.

With education representing nearly half of the state's overall budget, schools have not been left unscathed in Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's proposed budget, which seeks across-the-board cuts.

The latest official estimate for the budget deficit is at about \$8 billion, although many in the state capitol believe it may end up being close to \$14 billion.

But in terms of money for education, the governor's current plan (he is set to release a revised version in mid-May) would mean suspending the state's education funding obligation by cutting nearly \$5 billion from schools in the new fiscal year that begins on July 1.

Republicans say they've found a way to meet the state's education funding obligations under voter-approved Proposition 98.

The big items in the plan include taking back unspent education funds (\$450 million); postponing implementation of new programs (\$450 million); and dipping into certain excess transportation revenues (between \$600 million and \$700 million).

But all of these solutions will still leave them about \$1 billion short. Republicans today maintained that they oppose raising taxes, saying the remaining shortfall would have to come from cutting other items in the budget such as health and human services.

Democrats, who control the Legislature, are not impressed.

"It's the budget equivalent of robbing Peter to shortchange Paul," Steve Maviglio, spokesman for the outgoing Assembly Speaker Fabian Nunez, D-Los Angeles, said in a written statement.

Of course, the other problem is that with the governor getting ready to revise his state revenue forecast in a few weeks, the proposals set forth by the Republican lawmakers today may end up being outdated.